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INFO WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS
DEPT FOR CA/FPP
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DEPT ALSO PASS TO KCC
POSTS FOR FRAUD PREVENTION MANAGERS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KFRD](#) [CVIS](#) [ASEC](#) [SMIG](#) [PE](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: VACATIONS724 BREAKS ITS SILENCE TO INTIMIDATE
TRAVELER; POST MEETS WITH GOA ON ADVERTISING ISSUE

REF: BUENOS AIRES 12958; GUAYAQUIL 328

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Argentine traveler Carolina Millone reports that on-line travel agency Vacations724.com tries to intimate her after she goes public with their scam. Per reftels Buenos Aires FPU shares new information on Vacations724.com and its alleged owners. END SUMMARY.

Uncovering Who is Behind the Scam

2. (SBU) Refs A and B outline the travel scam perpetrated by the virtual travel agency, Vacations724.com. During its preliminary investigation (reftel A), FPU interviewed Argentine traveler Carolina Millone, who posted multiple complaints in online travel forums such as Trip Advisor describing how she was scammed. In November, a former Vacations724.com employee contacted Millone, claiming that she had worked for Vacations724.com in the U.S. for two years before returning to Argentina, and that her cousin still works for them. For security concerns, Millone would not share the woman's name with FPU but did share the following information.

3. (SBU) Vacations724.com's legal name is "Premier Destino." It is currently located at 600 NE 36 St, Miami, Suite C1, FL 33137. The alleged owner, Amaury Ciro Martinez, born on December 9, 1961, is married to illegal resident Soledad Martinez (Vacations724.com web domain is registered under her name). They reside at 4500 Sabal Palm Road, Miami, FL, the same address listed on several letters presented to post by Vacations724.com visa applicants. The former employee said that Vacations724.com hires illegal residents who use false names to sign their letters and emails. Employees include the following allegedly illegal aliens: Colombian national and signing manager Frida Mabel, alias Mabel Munera; and Peruvian nationals Sandy Rivas and Lourdes Cedeo (mother and daughter). The Miami Dade Criminal and Civil infractions web page shows that Amaury Martinez was convicted for assault and battery, grand theft in the 1st degree, burglary, cocaine possession, and resisting arrest.

Vacations724 Intimidates Ms. Millone

3. (SBU) In December, the alleged vice president of Vacations724.com Gustavo Garcia (also known as "El Che") contacted Millone via email telling her he would reimburse her money, if she agreed to remove all previous adverse posts on the internet within 24 hours and cease posting further complaints. Millone agreed and provided Garcia with a credit card number to process the reimbursement, which never arrived. She reported this through the online forum and received threatening responses from the agency through the forum. A few days later, Garcia called Millone telling her he knew that she had contacted the U.S. Embassy, and sent two emails to FPU which bounced

back because of the wrong email address. He also knew that their previous employee had contacted her, and that she had made travel plans for January 2010. As this information is true, Millone believes Vacations724.com had hacked into her computer. Garcia threatened her that "La Liga" would be waiting for her when she arrived in Miami because she had posted in a public forum that Vacations724.com staff were illegal aliens. Millone then began receiving late night phone calls from men requesting sexual services.

One of them referred her to the Miami-registered web page where her contact information was posted as someone offering these type of services. Millone had to contact the webmaster to have her information removed. After these incidents Millone told FPU that she was afraid and would stop posting information against Vacations724.com.

Meeting with GOA Produces Cooperation

15. (U) On December 30, FPM and Senior FPU investigator met with Ricardo Maldonado, director of travel agency licensing at the GOA Secretariat of Tourism to discuss the scam and to seek advice for scammed applicants. Dr. Ricardo stated that travel agencies that wish to advertise in Argentina must have a local, legal business in Argentina and must receive permission from his office. He suggested that Vacations724.com could be accused of false or misleading advertising, which constitutes a crime under Argentine penal code. He recommended FPU meet with the Argentina equivalent of the Better

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Business Bureau, Defensa del Consumidor, to discuss further. He also offered to post information on his department's official website warning potential travelers to be careful when purchasing travel via the web. FPU will meet with Dr. Maldonado and a representative from Defensa del Consumidor after they have reviewed FPU information.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Given Vacations724.com intimidation tactics and questionable business practices alleged by Ms. Millone, Buenos Aires wished to share this information with FPP and posts in case more such scams come to light. END COMMENT.
MARTINEZ